

**Election Day at the State House, by John Lewis Krimmel** Although politics was serious business in the Jacksonian era, it also provided the occasion for much socializing and merriment. This election-day crowd in Philadelphia appears to be in an especially festive mood. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

Electoral College were being chosen directly by the people rather than by state legislatures. Presidential nominations by a congressional caucus, meeting secretly, took on a bad odor. This procedure was now condemned as furtive, elitist, and subversive of democracy. The delicate checks and balances among the three federal branches were thought to be weakened when the president was indirectly indebted to Congress for his exalted office.

New and more democratic methods of nominating presidential candidates were devised. In 1824 the voters, crying "The People Must Be Heard" and "Down with King Caucus," turned against the candidate (Crawford) who had been selected by the congressional clique. For a brief period, nominations were made by some of the state legislatures. But these did not seem democratic either, and in 1831 the first of the circuslike national nominating conventions was held (by the short-lived but significant Anti-Masonic party). Here the people appeared to exercise greater control, though their will was often thwarted by paunchy bosses in smoke-filled rooms.

### The Adams-Clay "Corrupt" Bargaining

The woods were full of presidential timber in 1824. Four candidates towered above the others: Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, the tall, silver-maned, and hollow-cheeked "Old Hero" of New Orleans; Henry Clay of Kentucky, the gamy and gallant "Harry of the West"; William H. Crawford of Georgia, a giant of a man, able though ailing; and John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, highly intelligent, experienced, and aloof.

All four rivals professed to be "Republicans." Well-organized parties had not yet emerged, as illustrated by the fact that John C. Calhoun appeared as the vice-presidential candidate on both the Adams and the Jackson tickets.

The results of the noisy campaign were interesting but confusing. Jackson, the war hero, clearly had the strongest personal appeal, especially in the West. Foreshadowing the themes that would later shape the historical identity of his presidency, Jackson's campaign appealed for the salvation of republicanism from the forces of

*Election of 1824*

CANDIDATES	ELECTORAL VOTE	POPULAR VOTE	POPULAR PERCENTAGE
Jackson	99	153,544	42.16%
Adams	84	108,740	31.89
Crawford	41	46,618	12.95
Clay	37	47,136	12.99

corruption and privilege in government, especially as embodied in "King Caucus." He polled almost as many popular votes as his next two rivals combined, but he failed to win a majority of the electoral vote. In such a deadlock the House of Representatives, as directed by the Twelfth Amendment (see the Appendix), must choose among the top three candidates. Clay was thus eliminated, yet he still presided over the very chamber that had to pick the winner. Since he enjoyed all the influence of a popular Speaker of the House, he was in a position to throw the election to the candidate of his choice.

Clay reached his fateful decision by a process of elimination. Crawford, recently felled by a paralytic stroke, was out of the picture. Clay hated the "military chieftain" Jackson, his arch-rival for the allegiance of the West. Jackson, in turn, bitterly resented Clay's public denunciation of his Florida foray in 1818. The only candidate left was the puritanical Adams, with whom Clay—a free-living gambler and duelist—had never established cordial personal relations. But the two men had much in common politically: both were fervid nationalists and advocates of the American System. Shortly before the final balloting in the House, Clay met privately with Adams and assured him of his support.

Decision day came early in 1825. The House of Representatives met amid tense excitement, with sick members being carried in on stretchers. On the first ballot, thanks largely to Clay's behind-the-scenes influence, Adams was elected president. A few days later, the victor announced that Henry Clay would be the new secretary of state.

The secretaryship of state was then the prize plum, even more so than today. Three of the four preceding secretaries had reached the presidency, and the high cabinet office was regarded as

an almost certain runway to the White House. By allegedly dangling the secretaryship as a bribe before Clay, Adams, the second choice of the people, apparently defeated the first choice of the people, Andrew Jackson.

Masses of angered Jacksonians, most of them common folk, raised a roar of protest against the "corrupt bargain." The clamor continued for nearly four years. Jackson condemned Clay as the "Judas of the West," and John Randolph of Virginia publicly assailed the alliance between "the Puritan [Adams] and the black-leg [Clay]," who, he added "shines and stinks like rotten mackerel by moonlight." Clay, outraged, challenged Randolph to a duel, the bloodless outcome of which proved nothing, except perhaps shaky nerves and poor marksmanship.

No positive evidence has yet been unearthed to prove that Adams and Clay entered into a formal bargain, corrupt or otherwise. But appearances were so damning as to render denials unconvincing. Even if a bargain had been struck, it was not necessarily corrupt, for "deals" of a similar nature are the stock-in-trade of politicians. But this

Suspicions of a "corrupt bargain" have been strengthened by entries in the diary of John Quincy Adams (1767-1848). On January 1, 1825, after a public dinner, he wrote, "He [Clay] told me [in a whisper] that he should be glad to have with me soon some confidential conversation upon public affairs. I said I should be happy to have it whenever it might suit his convenience." The diary entry for January 9, reads in part, "Mr. Clay came at six, and spent the evening with me in a long conversation explanatory of the past and prospective of the future." Exactly a month later, with Clay's backing, Adams was elected.

"bargain" differed from others in its apparent flouting of the popular will by both Adams and Clay. Both men erred, the one by offering the post in circumstances sure to arouse suspicion, the other by accepting it.

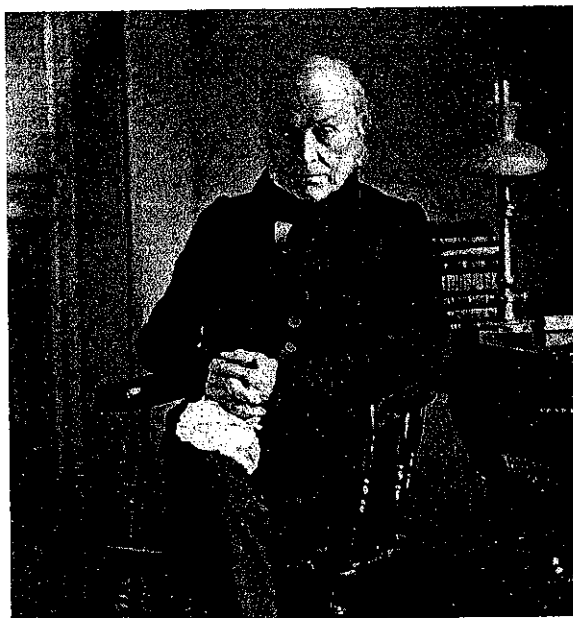
### A Yankee Misfit in the White House

John Quincy Adams was a chip off the old family glacier. Short (5 feet, 7 inches; 1.7 meters), thick-set, and billiard-bald, he was even more frigidly austere than his presidential father, John Adams. Shunning people, he often went for early morning swims, sometimes stark naked, in the then-pure Potomac River. Essentially a closeted thinker rather than a politician, he was irritable, sarcastic, and tactless. Yet few individuals have ever come to the presidency with a more brilliant record in statecraft, especially in foreign affairs. He ranks as one of the most successful secretaries of yet one of the least successful presidents.

A man of puritanical honor, Adams entered upon his four-year "sentence" in the White House smarting under charges of "bargain," "corruption," and "usurpation." Fewer than one-third of the voters had voted for him. As the first "minority president," he would have found it difficult to win popular support even under the most favorable conditions. Possessing almost none of the arts of the politician, he had achieved high office by commanding respect rather than by courting popularity. In an earlier era, an aloof John Adams could win the votes of propertied men by sheer ability. But with the raw New Democracy in the driver's seat, his cold-fish son could hardly hope for success at the polls.

Political spoilsmen annoyed Adams. Whether through high-mindedness or ineptitude, he resolutely declined to oust efficient officeholders in order to create vacancies for political supporters. During his entire administration he removed only twelve public servants from the federal payroll. Such stubbornness caused countless Adams followers to throw up their hands in despair. If the president would not reward party workers with political plums, why should they labor to keep him in office?

Adams's nationalistic views involved him in further woes. The old Jeffersonian Republican



**President John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), daguerreotype by Philip Haas, 1843** Adams wrote in his diary, in June 1819, nearly six years before becoming president, "I am a man of reserved, cold, austere, and forbidding manners: my political adversaries say, a gloomy misanthropist, and my personal enemies an unsocial savage." (The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of I. N. Phelps Stokes, Edward S. Hawes, Alice Mary Hawes, Marion Augusta Hawes, 1937.)

party was breaking into fragments, most of which tended to coalesce around a common hatred of the Adams-Clay partnership. The flinty president refused to recognize that the popular tide was turning away from the post-Ghent nationalism toward states' rights and sectionalism. Confirmed nationalist that he was, Adams urged upon Congress in his first annual message the construction of roads and canals. He renewed George Washington's proposal for a national university and went so far as to advocate federal support for an astronomical observatory, similar to Europe's more than 130 "lighthouses of the skies."

The public reaction to some of these proposals was prompt and unfavorable. To many workaday Americans grubbing out stumps, astronomical observatories seemed like a scandalous waste of public funds. The South in particular bristled. If the federal government should take on such heavy financial burdens, it would have to continue the hated tariff duties. If it could meddle in

winded speeches, though composed of nothing else than wind. Talk of your devotion to your country, your modesty and disinterestedness, or on any such fanciful subject. Rail against taxes of all kinds, officeholders, and bad harvest weather; and wind up with a flourish about the heroes who fought and bled for our liberties in the times that tried men's souls. To be sure, you run the risk of being considered a bladder of wind, or an empty barrel. But never mind that; you will find enough of the same fraternity to keep you in countenance.

"If any charity be going forward, be at the top of it, provided it is to be advertised publicly. If not, it isn't worth your while. None but a fool would place his candle under a bushel on such an occasion.

"These few directions," said I, "if properly attended to, will do your business. And when once elected—why, a fig for the dirty children, the promises, the bridges, the churches, the taxes, the offices, and the subscriptions. For it is absolutely necessary to forget all these before you can become a thoroughgoing politician, and a patriot of the first water."

## 6. John Quincy Adams and the "Corrupt Bargain"

### 1. Adams Confers with Henry Clay (1824–1825)

*In the free-for-all presidential campaign of 1824, the popular vote pushed General Jackson well ahead. Strung out behind were Secretary of State J. Q. Adams, Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford, and Speaker of the House Henry Clay, in that order. Since no candidate had won a majority in the Electoral College, the issue was thrown into the House of Representatives, with fourth-place Henry Clay eliminated. After a long private conference with Adams, Clay, a former foe, threw his potent support to Adams, who consequently was declared elected, on February 9, 1825. Three days later President-elect Adams formally offered Clay the secretaryship of state. Angry and suspicious Jacksonites promptly proclaimed that the secretaryship was a part of the "corrupt bargain" by which Adams had purchased the presidency of the United States. Do the following relevant excerpts from Adams's diary suggest that some kind of deal was entered into for Clay's support?*

[December 15, 1824] [Edward] Wyer [confidential informant] came also to the office [State Department], and told me that he had it from good authority that Mr. Clay was much disposed to support me, if he could at the same time be useful to himself. . . . I had conversation at dinner with Mr. Clay.

[December 17, 1824, conversation with R. P. Letcher, member of the House of Representatives of Kentucky, Clay's state.] Letcher wished to know what my sentiments towards Clay were, and I told him without disguise that I harbored no hostility against him; that whatever of difference there had been between us had arisen altogether from him, and not from me. . . . He was sure Clay felt now no hostility to

<sup>1</sup>C. F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), pp. 444, 447, 457, 464–465.

me. He had spoken respectfully of me, and was a man of sincerity. . . . The drift of all Letcher's discourse was much the same as Wyer had told me, that Clay would willingly support me if he could thereby serve himself, and the substance of his meaning was, that if Clay's friends could know that he would have a prominent share in the administration, that might induce them to vote for me, even in the face of instructions. But Letcher did not profess to have any authority from Clay for what he said and he made no definite propositions. He spoke of his interview with me as altogether confidential, and in my answers to him I spoke in more general terms.

[January 1, 1825, after a public dinner.] He [Clay] told me [in a whisper] that he should be glad to have with me soon some confidential conversation upon public affairs. I said I should be happy to have it whenever it might suit his convenience.

[January 9, 1825.] Mr. Clay came at six, and spent the evening with me in a long conversation explanatory of the past and prospective of the future. He said that the time was drawing near when the choice must be made in the House of Representatives of a President from the three candidates presented by the electoral colleges, that he had been much urged and solicited with regard to the part in that transaction that he should take, and had not been five minutes landed at his lodgings before he had been applied to by a friend of Mr. Crawford's, in a manner so gross that it had disgusted him; that some of my friends also, disclaiming, indeed, to have any authority from me, had repeatedly applied to him, directly or indirectly, urging considerations personal to himself as motives to his cause.

He had thought it best to reserve for some time his determination to himself first, to give a decent time for his own funeral solemnities as a candidate; and, secondly, to prepare and predispose all his friends to a state of neutrality between the three candidates who would be before the House, so that they might be free ultimately to take that course which might be most conducive to the public interest. The time had now come at which he might be explicit in his communication with me, and he had for that purpose asked this confidential interview. He wished me, as far as I might think proper, to satisfy him with regard to some principles of great public importance, but without any personal considerations for himself. In the question to come before the House between General Jackson, Mr. Crawford, and myself, he had no hesitation in saying that his preference would be for me.

*[At this point in his diary Adams, who was usually most painstaking, left a blank space, as though he intended to fill in later the details of the conversation. Dr. Samuel Flagg Bemis, his ablest biographer, states that "he let his conscience slip." On January 23, 1825, two weeks after the secret conference, Clay wrote to a correspondent that he believed he could enter the cabinet "in any situation" he desired. Both parties to the so-called corrupt bargain denied that they had made any specific deal. But politics being politics, some kind of informal understanding was almost certainly reached in advance; and it brought to the presidency a man who was not the people's choice. Dr. Bemis concluded that the so-called corrupt bargain was "the least questionable of the several deals" that Adams made to secure his election.]*

## 2. Clay Protests His Innocence (1825)

*Henry Clay, hard bitten by the presidential bug, probably would have favored Adams in any event. He had quarreled bitterly with General Jackson, who remained his lifelong foe. Crawford was now a paralytic wreck, unable to walk normally or speak distinctly. Clay readily perceived that if Jackson, a fellow westerner, entered the White House, the country probably would not stomach another westerner as his successor. In passages from two letters, the first to Francis P. Blair and the second to Francis Brooke, Clay thus unburdened himself. What was his ostensible reason for opposing Jackson? What was his attitude toward Adams? Do these statements support the contention that there was no "corrupt bargain"?*

[January 29, 1825] The friends of [Jackson?] have turned upon me, and with the most amiable unanimity agree to vituperate me. . . . The knaves cannot comprehend how a man can be honest. They cannot conceive that I should have solemnly interrogated my conscience and asked it to tell me seriously what I ought to do. That it should have enjoined me not to establish the dangerous precedent of elevating, in this early stage of the Republic, a military chieftain, merely because he has won a great victory. That it should have told me that a public man is undeserving his station who will not, regardless of aspersions and calumnies, risk himself for his country.

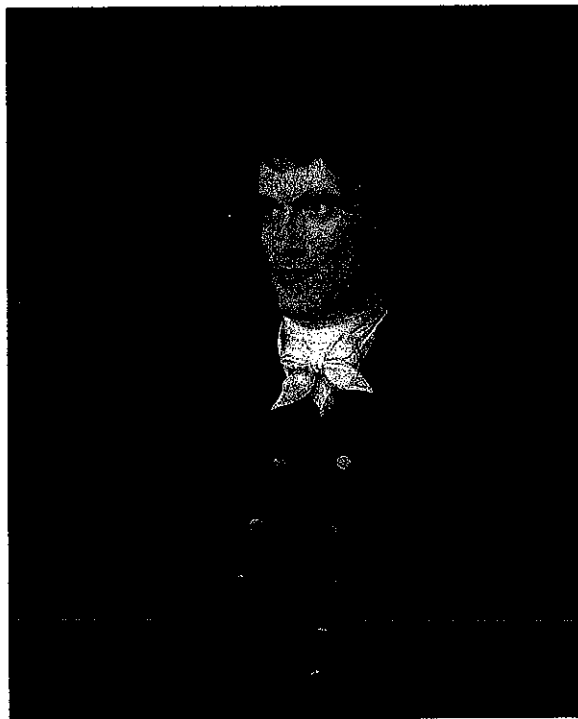
I am afraid that you will think me moved by these abuses. Be not deceived. I assure you that I never in my whole life felt more perfect composure, more entire confidence in the resolutions of my judgment, and a more unshakable determination to march up to my duty. And, my dear sir, is there an intelligent and unbiased man who must not, sooner or later, concur with me?

Mr. Adams, you know well, I should never have selected, if at liberty to draw from the whole mass of our citizens for a President. But there is no danger in his elevation now, or in time to come. Not so of his competitor, of whom I cannot believe that killing two thousand five hundred Englishmen at New Orleans qualifies for the various, difficult, and complicated duties of the Chief Magistracy.

[February 4, 1825.] I observe what you kindly tell me about the future Cabinet. My dear sir, I want no office. When have I shown an avidity for office? In rejecting the mission to Russia and the Department of War under one administration? In rejecting the same Department, the mission to England, or any other foreign mission under the succeeding administration? If Mr. Adams is elected, I know not who will be his Cabinet; I know not whether I shall be offered a place in it or not. If there should be an offer, I shall decide upon it, when it may be made, according to my sense of duty. But do you not perceive that this denunciation of me, by anticipation, is a part of the common system between the discordant confederates which I have above described? Most certainly, if an office should be offered to me under the new administration, and I should be induced to think that I ought to accept it, I shall not be deterred from accepting it, either by the denunciations of open or secret enemies, or the hypocrisy of pretended friends.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin Colton, ed., *The Works of Henry Clay* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), vol. 4, pp. 112-114.





**John C. Calhoun (1782–1850), attributed to Charles Bird King, c. 1818–1825** Calhoun was a South Carolinian, educated at Yale. Beginning as a strong nationalist and Unionist, he reversed himself and became the ablest of the sectionalists and disunionists in defense of the South and slavery. As a foremost nullifier, he died trying to reconcile strong states' rights with a strong Union. In his last years he advocated a Siamese-twin presidency, probably unworkable, with one president for the North and one for the South. His former plantation home is now the site of Clemson University. (National Portrait Gallery/Art Resource, New York.)

as consumers and as producers, as importers and exporters. Little wonder that southern leaders regarded the protective tariff as a foe of their economic development. On the other hand, many failed to appreciate that in the long run a prosperous manufacturing economy in the Northeast could itself contribute to their prosperity by consuming their cotton and other farm products.

South Carolinians took the lead in protesting against the "Tariff of Abominations." Their legislature went so far as to publish in 1828, though without formal endorsement, a pamphlet known as "The South Carolina Exposition." It had been secretly written by John C. Calhoun, one of the few topflight political theorists ever produced by

America. (As vice president, he was forced to conceal his authorship.) "The Exposition" boldly denounced the recent tariff as unjust and unconstitutional. Going a stride beyond the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1798, it bluntly and explicitly proposed that the states should nullify the tariff—that is, they should declare it null and void within their borders.

Calhoun found himself caught in an awkward straddle. Still a Unionist and a nationalist, he was also a southern sectionalist. He therefore desperately sought a formula that would protect the minority in the South from the "tyranny of the majority" in the North and West. Seizing upon nullification, he undertook by this explosive device to preserve the Union and prevent secession. Calhoun's aim was not to destroy the Union but to salvage it by quieting the fears of those forces that might one day destroy it.

Calhoun's "Exposition," at least immediately, was a false alarm. No other state joined South Carolina in its heated antitariff protest. But the disruptive theory of nullification was further publicized, and the even more dangerous doctrine of secession was foreshadowed. South Carolina was not then prepared to force the controversy to a showdown. The election of Carolina-born Andrew Jackson to the presidency had occurred two weeks earlier, and the "Old Hero"—a fellow cotton planter and slaveowner—was expected to sympathize with the plight of the South.

### Going "Whole Hog" for Jackson in 1828

The presidential campaign for Andrew Jackson had started early. It began on February 9, 1825, the day of John Quincy Adams's controversial election by the House, and continued noisily for nearly four years.

Even before the election of 1828, the temporarily united Republicans of the Era of Good Feelings had split into two camps. One was the National Republicans, with the ultranationalistic Adams as their standard-bearer. The other was the Democratic-Republicans, with the fiery Jackson heading their ticket. Rallying cries of the Jackson zealots were "Bargain and Corruption," "Huzza for Jackson," and "All Hail Old Hickory."

Jacksonites planted hickory poles for their hickory-tough hero; "Adamsites" adopted the oak as the symbol of their oakenly independent candidate.

"Shall the people rule?" was the chief issue of 1828, at least to Jacksonians. They argued that the will of the voters had been thwarted in 1825 by the backstairs "bargain" of Adams and Clay. The only way to right the wrong was to seat Jackson, who would then bring about "reform" by sweeping out the "dishonest" Adams gang. "Jackson and Reform" was a widely mouthed slogan, and hickory brooms were brandished as tokens of a forthcoming "clean sweep." Seldom has the public mind been so successfully poisoned against an honest and high-minded president.

Mudslinging reached a disgraceful level, partly as a result of the taste of the new mass electorate for bare-knuckle politics. Adams would not stoop to gutter tactics, but many of his backers were less squeamish. They described Jackson's mother as a prostitute; they printed black-bordered handbills, shaped like coffins, recounting his numerous duels and brawls and trumpeting his hanging of six mutinous militiamen. The "Old Hero" was also branded an adulterer. He had married an estimable woman, Rachel Robards, confident that her divorce had been granted. To the consternation of both, they discovered two years later that it had not been, and they made haste to correct the marital miscue.

Rachel Jackson was crushed by the vicious charges of bigamy and adultery. She lived to see her husband win the presidency, but she died—supposedly of a broken heart—before she could become First Lady. Jackson, devotedly attached to his wife, was convinced that his enemies had killed her. He never forgave them.

Jackson men also hit below the belt. President Adams had purchased, with his own money and for his own use, a billiard table and a set of chess-



**Rachel Jackson** A devoted wife who did not live to become First Lady, she had unwittingly, and hence innocently, involved herself and her husband in scandal. (The Granger Collection, New York.)

men. In the mouths of rabid Jacksonites, these items became "gaming tables" and "gambling furniture" for the "presidential palace." Criticism was also unfairly directed at the large sums Adams had received over the years in federal salaries, well earned though they had been. He was even accused of having procured a servant girl for the lust of a Russian nobleman while minister to Russia—in short, of having served as a pimp.

### The Jacksonian "Revolution of 1828"

General Jackson, victorious on the battlefields, was no less victorious at the ballot boxes. The popular tally was 647,286 votes for him to 508,064 for Adams, with an electoral count of 178 to 83. Support for Jackson came mainly from the West and South, and to a considerable extent from the sweat-stained laborers of the eastern seaboard. Generally speaking, the common people—

One anti-Jackson newspaper declared, "General Jackson's mother was a Common Prostitute, brought to this country by the British soldiers! She afterwards married a MULATTO man with whom she had several children, of which number GENERAL JACKSON is one."



though by no means all of them—voted for the Hero of New Orleans. Adams won the backing of his own New England, as well as the propertied “better elements” of the Northeast.

The election of 1828 has often been called the “Revolution of 1828.” Actually, as in 1800, no upheaval or landslide swept out the incumbent. Adams, in fact, polled a respectable 44 percent of the popular vote. A considerable part of Jackson’s support, moreover, was lined up by machine politicians, especially in New York and Pennsylvania, and not entirely among the leather-aproned artisans and other manual workers.

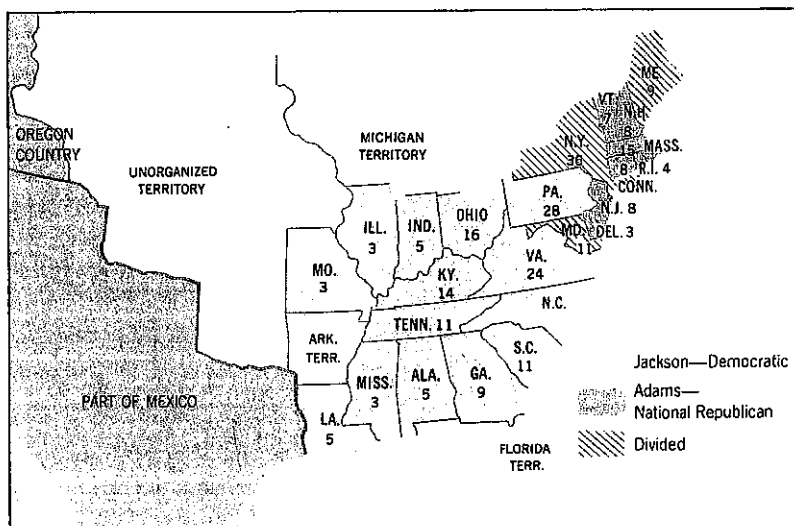
But the concept of a *political* revolution in 1828 is not completely farfetched. The increased turnout of voters proved that the common people, especially in the universal-white-manhood-suffrage states, now had the vote and the will to use it for their ends. A discontented West, with its numerous rustics and debtors, generally voted for Jackson. The results show that the political center of gravity was continuing to shift away from the conservative eastern seaboard toward the emerging states across the mountains.

So in a broader sense the election *was* a “revolution,” comparable to that of 1800. It was a peaceful revolution, achieved by ballots instead of bullets, by counting heads instead of crushing them. “Shall the people rule?” cried the Jacksonians. The answering roar seemed to say, “The people *shall* rule!” In the struggle between the

poorer masses and the entrenched classes, the homespun folk scored a resounding triumph, befuddling some members of the elite establishment. “I never saw anything like it,” a puzzled Daniel Webster mused about Jackson’s inaugural. “Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger.”

America hitherto had been ruled by an elite of brains and wealth, whether aristocratic Federalist shippers or aristocratic Jeffersonian planters. Jackson’s victory accelerated the transfer of national power from the countinghouse to the farmhouse, from the East to the West, and from the snobs to the mobs. If Jefferson had been the hero of the gentleman farmer, Jackson was the hero of the dirt farmer. The plowholders were now ready to take over the government—their government.

Adams, though president-reject, was still destined for an enviable public career. Ever high-minded, he did not deem it beneath his dignity as an ex-president to accept election to the House of Representatives from Massachusetts. (“No person can be degraded by serving the people,” he declared.) There he served with conspicuous success for seventeen fruitful years. Affectionately known as “Old Man Eloquent,” he fought stalwartly for free government, free speech, free soil, and free people. A rough and savage debater, he finally was stricken on the floor of the House in



#### Presidential Election of 1828 (with electoral vote by state)

Jackson swept the South and West, whereas Adams retained the old Federalist stronghold of the Northeast. Yet Jackson's inroads in the Northeast were decisive. He won twenty of New York's electoral votes, and all twenty-eight of Pennsylvania's. If those votes had gone the other way, Adams would have been victorious—by a margin of one vote.

1848, at age eighty. His funeral was the greatest pageant of its kind that Washington had yet seen. Ironically, the popularity that had escaped him in life came to him in death.

### The Advent of "Old Hickory" Jackson

Andrew Jackson cut a striking figure—tall (6 feet, 1 inch; 1.86 meters), gaunt, and with bushy iron-gray hair brushed high above a prominent forehead, craggy eyebrows, and blue eyes. His irritability and emaciated condition (140 pounds; 64 kilograms) probably had resulted in part from long-term bouts with dysentery, malaria, tuberculosis, and lead poisoning from two bullets that he carried in his body from near-fatal duels. His autobiography was largely written in his lined face.

To a considerable degree, Jackson personified the new West. He reflected its individualism, its jack-of-all-trades versatility, its opportunism, its energy, its directness, and its prejudices. He was a genuine folk hero—an uncommon common man. The backwoods preacher who cried that Jesus was "just another Andrew Jackson" reflected a sentiment that did not seem out of place to some.

Jackson's upbringing was not of the best. Born in the Carolinas and early orphaned, "Mischievous Andy" grew up without parental restraints. As a youth he displayed much more interest in brawling and cockfighting than in his scanty opportunities for reading and spelling. Although he ultimately learned to express himself in writing with vigor and clarity, his grammar was always rough-hewn, and his spelling was often original, like that of many contemporaries. He sometimes misspelled a word two different ways in the same letter.

The youthful Carolinian had the foresight to emigrate "up West" to Tennessee, where a fighting man was more highly regarded than a writing man. There—through native intelligence, force of personality, and powers of leadership—he became a judge and a member of Congress. His passions were so profound that on occasion he would choke into silence when he tried to speak. He won the greatest fame as a commander of militia troops, who dubbed him "Old Hickory" in honor

of his toughness. Afflicted with a violent temper, he early became involved in numerous duels, stabbings, and other bloody frays. But, rough and forthright as democracy itself, he made things move.

The first president from the West, the first nominated at a formal party convention (in 1832), and the first without a college education (except Washington), Jackson was unique. His university was adversity. He had risen from the masses, but he was not one of them, except insofar as he shared many of their prejudices. Essentially a frontier aristocrat, he owned many slaves, cultivated broad acres, and lived in one of the finest mansions in America—the Hermitage, near Nashville, Tennessee. More westerner than easterner, more country gentleman than common clay, more courtly than crude, he was hard to fit into a neat category:

He's none of your old New England stock,  
Or your gentry-proud Virginians,  
But a regular Western fighting-cock  
With Tennessee opinions.\*

As befitted an authentic man of the people and hero of the one-suspender man, Jackson's political ideas had a stark simplicity. Like the antifederalists of an earlier day, he was suspicious of the federal government as a bastion of privilege, an institution dangerously remote from popular scrutiny. He was therefore determined to reduce it "to that simple machine which the Constitution created," which meant, among other things, hostility to the active federal economic role envisioned by Henry Clay's American System. Conversely, he and especially his followers were generally friendly toward the frothy democracy bubbling up in the states and looked with some favor on economic activism on the part of state governments. Yet Jackson was destined to disappoint some of his states' rights supporters in the South by his insistence on the sacredness of the Union and the ultimate supremacy of federal power over that of the states.

\* "Andrew Jackson," from *A Book of Americans*, by Rosemary & Stephen Vincent Benét. Copyright 1933, by Rosemary & Stephen Vincent Benét. Copyright renewed ©, 1961, by Rosemary Carr Benét. Reprinted by permission of Brandt & Brandt Literary Agency, Inc.



**Jackson Sewing Box, 1828** Andrew Jackson was marketed as a military hero, an image that appealed to women and men alike, as illustrated by this sewing box. (Division of Political History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.)

While president, Jackson proved to be a storm center. As a former military man, he demanded prompt and loyal support from his subordinates. If one was not for him, one was against him. Cherishing strong ideas as to his constitutional prerogatives, he ignored the Supreme Court on several conspicuous occasions. He likewise defied or dominated Congress as few presidents have done. Jackson's six predecessors had wielded the veto a total of ten times; during his two terms he employed it twelve times, sometimes on grounds of personal distaste rather than constitutional principle. Jackson's modest use of the veto ax was

perfectly legitimate, but his numerous enemies condemned him as "King Andrew the First."

Jackson's inauguration symbolized the newly won ascendancy of the masses. "Hickoryites" poured into Washington from far places, sleeping on hotel floors and in hallways. They were curious to see their hero take office and perhaps to pick up a well-paying office for themselves. Nobodies mingled with notables as the White House, for the first time, was thrown open to the multitude. A milling crowd of clerks, shopkeepers, hobnailed artisans, and grimy laborers surged in, wrecking the china and furniture, and threatening the "people's champion" with cracked ribs. Jackson was hastily spirited through a side door, and the White House miraculously emptied itself when the word was passed that huge bowls of well-spiked punch had been placed on the lawns. Such was "the inaugural brawl."

To conservatives, this orgy seemed like the end of the world. "King Mob" reigned triumphant as Jacksonian vulgarity replaced Jeffersonian simplicity. Faint-hearted traditionalists shuddered, drew their blinds, and recalled the opening scenes of the French Revolution.

In 1824 Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) said of Jackson: "When I was President of the Senate he was a Senator, and he could never speak on account of the rashness of his feelings. I have seen him attempt repeatedly, and as often choke with rage. His passions are no doubt cooler now, but he is a dangerous man."